

International Workshop Migration and Informality in Central and Eastern Europe (MICEE)

Rationale

Traditionally seen as “exporting” migrants to Western Europe and North America, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, along with the former USSR ones, have recently become important migration hubs and destination. Initial trends tended to see the region as strategic for outsourcing. However, the improvement of the economic conditions, along with the recent refugee crisis has added a second category of migrants to the region. This has meant that, in addition to the skilled workers, the region has also witnessed an increasing amount of immigration from people with either low qualifications, no legal right to work or stay or simply missing the skills to quickly integrate into local job markets.

The issue of legality is only a marginal one. Indeed, the International Organisation for Migrations warns that most of labour migrants worldwide are employed in the informal sector, which implies that the informality has become part and parcel of the everyday life of labour migrants in many countries of the world. In this respect, a number of studies have pinpointed at the contrast between the – *de jure* - existence of norms to deal with migrants against a *de facto* (partial or total) state incapacity to deal with migration flows and integration of foreign citizens in a number of cases. These studies explore how and why public authorities failed to adequately manage labour migration flows, which led to the emergence of large informal migrant labour markets. However, much of the previous research (a) emanate from Latin American, African and Southern European contexts, and (b) view informality as a social evil that impedes migrants’ socio-economic and legal integration, an approach that overlooks the informal avenues of integration which serve the needs of many undocumented migrants. Moreover, in spite of a growing number of empirical works, the body of literature on migration flows and informality, with special reference to the post-socialist region, is still limited to few case studies (Reeves 2013, Yalcin-Heckmann 2013, Heusala and Aitamurto 2016, Urinboyev and Polese 2016).

In this light, the newly established research network MICEE will seek to enquire into the link between migration and informality in CEE region during the international workshop in Lund. Our network aims to contribute new theoretical insights and empirical evidence to the growing body of literature on migration and informality (e.g. Maroukis *et al.* 2011, Arbex *et al.* 2013, Sheehan and Riosmena 2013, Arango and Baldwin-Edwards 2014, Bastia 2015, Crush and Chikanda 2015). With this in mind, the workshop is conceived as a reflection on the topic with the following objectives:

- Provide further empirical evidence on the existence, performance and persistence of informal practices. In particular, we are interested in the way new informal practices, stimulated by migration flows overlap with, reshape and reconstitute a socio-economic tissue fed by already existing informal practices
- Theorise the relationship between migratory flows and informal practices to consolidate a sub-field of informality studies and contribute to a broader understanding of informal practices in Eastern Europe
- Unveil new patterns and tendencies in the region to contribute to policy debates on governance of public spaces in the post-socialist region. In this respect, we seek a dialogue beyond academia and policy analysis and policy making with the goal of informing and contribute to better targeted interventions in the region.

The list of topics we intend to cover is intended to include:

- Economy and employment (informal labour relations)
- Religious practice (informal Mosques, religious healing, religious service)
- Legal issues (documentation, border crossing)
- Medical service and provision (informal health care and clinics)
- Child care and education (informal and home schooling)

To meet these objectives, we will be encouraging speakers to present evidence-based case studies while prompting a reflection on the theoretical meaning, and significance, of their case.

Output

The outputs resulting from the MICEE network workshop can be divided into four parts:

- (1) The workshop will provide the platform for launching our new research network MICEE. The network has so far existed informally, via email communications and occasional meetings during the conferences. This workshop will be the first event where all network members come together and discuss future events and joint research grant application and publications.
- (2) We are planning to initiate an edited volume focusing on migration and informality in Central and Eastern Europe. We have already contacted Prof Tim Shaw, editor of the Palgrave series in the Critical Political Economy. Our network member Dr. Abel Polese has already published 2 books there.
- (3) The findings of the workshop will also be disseminated via a shorter series of articles published in popular media outlets (e.g. Transitions, Baltic Worlds), thereby making our findings accessible for the benefit of non-academic public interested in the region.
- (4) We are also planning to develop a new research application on migration and informality in Central and Eastern Europe. The intention is to submit this application to EU Horizon 2020 MSCA RISE program in order to obtain further funding for more institutionalized cooperation between the academic institutions that network members belong to.